

Come, Lord Jesus – make these words to be for us Your word of life. Amen.

What is your experience of giving? Does it flow freely, or do you feel obligated?
Are there some people or things you just do not want to give to?
Are there some people or causes to whom you could never give enough?
Do you give only when you have some extra, or do you pull out of your principal?

Our readings today show us two widows with different approaches to giving.
The widow in Zapheth does not want to give to this man of God who asks her...

She does not have enough; in fact, she's at the end of our resources.

She's been enduring a drought, and is the sole source of support for her son.
Now she wants to use it all up on one last cake before they die of starvation.
And this prophet comes along asking for her last bit of flour and oil.

"Give it all – and see what God does."

Now this prophet, Elijah, has been on the run from evil Queen Jezebel, and has
had to get used to God feeding him – through ravens, miracles, all kinds of ways.
He has experienced provision. He has given it all and God keeps coming through.
He always has enough – not too much left over, but enough.

So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family.

*For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry,
in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.*

God's abundance is sometimes just enough.

Maybe we stay closer to God when we have just enough.

We don't know much about the widow of Jerusalem – except we can guess she
has every much reason to hold on to her resources as does the other widow.
Widows in biblical times had no legal protections.

When your husband was gone, that was it – you couldn't own land or a business.

Either someone else came along and married you, or you lived on handouts.

And yet, here is this widow putting her tithe into the treasury –

two coins, much less in total than what the wealthy were putting in.

But percentage wise? Much more. Jesus says it was 100 percent of what she had.

These well-off folks are making a big show of giving their 10 percent –

and here comes this poor widow, giving it all. All she has. Trusting enough.

Why would she give so much, all she had? Because she had nothing to lose?

Having nothing to lose can make it easier for us to trust in God.

That's why Jesus said it was difficult for the wealthy to enter into the life of God – we have so, so much to lose – why trust in what you can't see, when you can trust in your bank account and stock portfolio. It takes a lot of spiritual maturity to enjoy these gifts without putting our faith in them.

I think she put it all in because she trusted in God to provide.

Radical trust is what we're called to. Radical trust leads to joy.

When I don't hoard and save and worry; when I expect abundance,

that's what I receive. And when I expect scarcity, that's what I experience.

God loves us either way. God provides either way – but we miss out on joy.

Before that day, that widow in Zapheth was always so afraid of running out.

Maybe she was like many of us – willing to do something for God,

but first she was going to take care of herself and her son.

And what Elijah told her was to reverse it:

Give to God's people first, and then look and see what comes your way.

“Be a part of God's life, not the other way around.”

But as she took that chance and trusted God, she was set free.

Jesus taught that's how it works in the Kingdom of God. You don't see it before you give it away – only as you give it away does it become clear.

This is a challenge for us as we face budgeting for next year.

After a few years of running a deficit, we need to increase income or cut expenses.

Simple math. But God's math works in funny ways.

Five loaves and two fish is not enough to feed 5,000 people – but they did.

A little oil and flour will run out and then you're done... except they don't run out.

A church budget is a faith document.

We need to budget wisely, but not to cut the funds that allow us to be the church,

to make a space for Charles County to pray and gather in;

to provide vibrant worship and spiritual nourishment for our children and adults;

and to reach out in faith to this community that does not know who we are.

That requires wise and faithful investment of our funds – investing our funds

not only in stocks and bonds, but also in what we believe God is calling us to do.

We are part of a pioneering initiative among several Episcopal churches in

Charles County to experiment with sharing a priest.

This person will serve as a quarter-time rector for St. James' Indian Head, and develop a ministry among that church and the other three churches in the constellation that we believe will help us grow: help us grow deeper in faith, and equip us to connect with people in our community who can become part of our churches. This priest will be with us at worship once a month, and spend most of their time developing this new ministry. In a time when churches are declining all over the country, and the old models are not working, this is a chance for us to invest in trying out something new. It is a chance for us to put some of our reserves in play in faith, trusting God's provision, trusting in the oil and flour that do not run out.

Trust isn't only about our money – but our money does show where our hearts are. When we hold it tight, we experience tightness. When we loosen our grip, we are free to receive all kinds of gifts. The more we give, the more room we have for receiving. When we give of what we have, it releases space for God to move in bigger ways.

As we each estimate what we can give to move God's mission forward at Christ Church in 2025 – let's think big. Let's ask God what percentage of our income we can release to the mission of Christ Church.

Let's not do it from a place of duty, which happens if we base our giving on our expenses; that's what the wealthy folks in the temple were doing, paying dues. And let's do it not from a place of need – “We need to repair this old building, we need to pay the priest...” but from a place of abundance and excitement: “Look at where God has placed this church, and the resources and people we have. I want to be a part of that!”

Let's do it from a place of freedom and expectation. When we base our giving on a percentage of our income, we begin to move into freedom. Income goes down, so does our giving. Income goes up, so does giving.

Let our giving reflect our trust and our love – so that we give not until it hurts, but until it feels good. Our Senior Warden, Karen Hile, gives tremendously of her time and many gifts to help us thrive, but she and Tim also give of their wealth, even when they don't feel wealthy. Karen is going to tell us how she is learning to give until it feels good.

READINGS:

1 Kings 17:8-16

Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah:

"Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food."

So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?" As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread." "As surely as the LORD your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread--only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it--and die." Elijah said to her, "**Don't be afraid.** Go home and do as you have said. **But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son.**

For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: "The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land." She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.

Mark 12:38-44

As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely."

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, **this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.** They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything— all she had to live on."